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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

Addendum

Barbados (195th meeting on 23 January 1992)

1. In replying to questions raised, the representative of Barbados said that, having noted the concern expressed by members of the Committee over the protective legislation in favour of women, so far there had been no complaints in that area. Replying to questions related to bigamy, she said that bigamy was a criminal act, although men had sometimes a married and a common-law spouse. For the section on tourism, she explained that almost an equal proportion of men and women were employed in the tourist industry; women were actively involved in the service, accommodation and promotional areas; the director of the Board of Tourism was a woman; and women were also managers of a large proportion of hotels and guest houses.

2. Turning to questions raised under articles 2 and 3, the representative said that attempts were being made to change the provision of section 23 of the Constitution, which dealt with the protection from discrimination, however without specifying sex. Referring to other questions, she said that the Convention was not directly part of national law and could, therefore, not be directly referred to by the courts. The office of the Ombudsman had been set up to deal with complaints surrounding the public service, which had been referred to it through recognized procedures, and it published an annual report on its work. Women could make use of the courts whenever their rights were curtailed. The National Commission on the Status of Women, which had been established in 1976, had completed its task in 1978 and had now been replaced by the National Advisory Council of Women. She circulated to the members of the Committee a document that had been prepared by the Bureau of

Women's Affairs for the Nairobi Women's World Conference in 1985 and which contained the 212 recommendations of the National Commission on the Status of Women. They had all been accepted and acted upon by the Government and constituted the basis for the National Plan of Action. Since 1970, there had been a Ministry for Women's Affairs, of which the Bureau of Women's Affairs formed a part. The Bureau, and several women's organizations as well, provided legal aid for women.

3. In replying to questions raised in connection with the large number of households headed by single women, she explained that they might be the result of a divorce, of a visiting relationship where the father bore the responsibility for the maintenance of the children, or of a union in which the father had abdicated his family responsibilities. She also said that historically the legacy of slavery had discouraged permanent family unions and marriage. In cases of divorce, reciprocal maintenance obligations existed for the spouse and the children, whereas in the case of visiting relationships women were mostly working outside the home and were assisted by the father and, if not, support could be enforced through the courts or obtained from the Welfare Department.

4. Regarding the issue of violence against women, as referred to in questions under article 5, she said that there was domestic violence and violence related to several offences committed against women and children of either sex. Any kind of violence was a criminal offence, the perpetrator was put under criminal law sanctions, and on the other hand, the assaulted victim could sue the perpetrator also in a civil law suit. The proposed legislation dealing with domestic violence, harassment and sexual offences had been recommended by the National Commission and was currently in the final stages of debate in Parliament. It allowed for counselling of the victim, the perpetrator and family members and for protective measures. She mentioned shelters for battered women, a telephone hotline crisis service and a mass-media programme and that efforts were also being made to collect gender-based statistics on violence.

5. On article 6, neither the Board of Tourism nor a university study of the phenomenon had concluded that there was a linkage between tourism and prostitution. Although she admitted that prostitution existed in Barbados, she said that it had not yet reached the proportions of "sex tourism". The Government and several agencies provided skills training for young women and thus provided employment prospects for them in order to prevent them from being drawn into prostitution. The conviction of a person under the Vagrancy Act was not left to the arbitrary decision of a magistrate, it was done following normal court procedures based on evidence as any other court case. Trafficking in women was not currently evident in the country, and the immigration department closely controlled any entries. Seminars were being held for preventing drug abuse by young people, and rehabilitation for drug offenders was available through the hospital services.

6. Turning to article 7, the representative said that women were indeed actively involved in politics and decision-making. They used their force and were politically very much aware, they canvassed and campaigned. The two main reasons for the low representation of women in Parliament were women's fear of disruption of family life through holding public office and the rigorous nature of political campaigning. For those reasons women hesitated to offer themselves as candidates for elections, and a quota system would not make any changes in the short term. She said that the Committee's pertinent observations on the low number of women in public office would be brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities. She added, however, that the head of State was a woman. Regarding the query concerning the high number of women's organizations, women chose the organizations to which they wanted to be affiliated; they identified issues of national concern and often initiated action. The Government provided subventions to women's organizations, which promoted the cause of women, and supported also a programme for furthering young women's careers. The umbrella body was the National Organization of Women, through which policy matters could be channelled for the attention of the Government.

7. On article 9, the representative reported that women's organizations and the Government were currently reviewing the law concerning citizenship.

8. Referring to article 10, she said that all schools, with the exception of three public secondary schools, were co-educational. Students selected the subjects they wished to pursue, and family life education was a regular feature in secondary schools and youth organizations.

9. On article 11, it was reported that by law there was equal pay for work of equal value; however, in practice that law was not strictly observed, like in other countries. She explained the four different pension schemes and said that the court decision in case of unfair dismissal on grounds of pregnancy might result in compensation or in reinstatement. She was unaware of complaints from pregnant job applicants. During the 12 weeks' maternity leave the employee received a full salary. The legislation concerning protective measures regarding safety and health at the work place applied equally to women and men. All women in case of need could resort to the Legal Aid Scheme, which had been established by the Government and was supplemented by a legal aid project for women funded by the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States. Legal aid was free of charge for applicants unable to meet the cost.

10. Referring to article 12, she stated that termination of pregnancy was permitted by law in special circumstances prior to, and after 12 weeks' duration. Seminars were being held to educate young people, and contraceptive information and facilities were readily available. She also said that the HIV/AIDS scare and public information seemed to have led to a reduction in teenage pregnancies. Figures on the female mortality rate, which was very low, would be provided in subsequent reports.

11. Turning to article 13, it was reported that low-income persons were exempted from income tax. The provision according to which only the husband had access to children's allowances referred only to the filing of income tax returns and not to actual maintenance.

12. Under article 14, the representative stated that both rural and urban women were involved in agriculture; women could also own and operate their own farms and agricultural enterprises. Rural and urban children had equal access to school education.

13. On article 16, it was reported that the Family Law Act of 1981 recognized a common-law relationship to the extent that, on separation, the parties had an enforceable right to maintenance and property distribution. Children born out of wedlock were regarded as the children of both parents and had the same rights as children born within a marital union. The dowry system had never existed in Barbados. Divorce was based on the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage evidenced by a 12 months' separation. The Government provided counselling and reconciliation services. Support for children was normally offered up to the age of 18, but might continue depending on specific circumstances.

14. Members expressed their gratitude to the representative for having answered the questions. However, considering that Barbadian women scarcely participated in political life and there was no quota system to provide incentives, members observed that women were still utilized in political campaigns and that something had to be done to remedy that situation. The representative commented that the participation of women in political life was a relatively new phenomenon. As women were still hesitant to go into active politics, it would take some time to see significant changes in that respect. However, the strategies adopted by the Bureau of Women's Affairs and the consciousness-raising seminars were already showing positive results, which would be reflected in the subsequent periodic report.

15. Regarding a comment made on whether development aid reached women and women's organizations, the representative explained that women could have direct access to such aid through their organizations, provided that their project proposals were in harmony with the national development aid programme.

16. With respect to a comment made with regard to battering and rape, she said that not only the female victim could claim protection, but also a third party, who was a victim, or the perpetrator.

17. Members had asked for more information about the situation of female-headed households, but she said that it was certainly difficult for outsiders to understand that situation in the Caribbean. For centuries women had to handle the burden as a legacy of slavery, and they did it very well. The extended family was an essential family support mechanism. As, owing to current developments that support was fading away, the Government was trying to ensure regular day-care facilities, which should correspond to a set standard. She emphasized that the single female heads of households were not

disadvantaged. For instance, 60 per cent of all the mortgages were granted to women. She also mentioned a certain magazine that highlighted on a continuous basis the different roles played by women in society.

18. Referring to a request for clarifying the steps to be taken and the fields in which efforts should be concentrated to improve the status of women in Barbados further, the representative enumerated a number of areas in which assistance would be needed. The first one was to try to absorb the shock of the current structural adjustment situation, which would have negative effects, especially on female-headed households. Others were the problem of violence against women; the additional resources needed for carrying on the leadership training programmes for facilitating to women the entry into political life; and strengthening of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, which was faced with scarce financial and human resources. The Bureau also needed assistance for collecting and reorganizing statistical data and for doing research, especially as it was currently drawing on the university's support in that respect. Furthermore, help was requested from women's organizations to guide women and to motivate them to take strong actions and to get more involved in political activities.

19. In the concluding observations, the Committee expressed its appreciation for the content, the structure and the frankness of the report and its illustrative annexes. It demonstrated clearly the Government's political will to eliminate the obstacles to the advancement of women. The activities of non-governmental organizations to further the status of women had been noted. Considering the high percentage of women voters and the low participation of women in political life, members were satisfied to see that the Government relied on women and was conscious of the problems. All the points raised had well been clarified by the representative and the steps taken by the Bureau of Women's Affairs were specially welcomed. Members noted that the government offices were aware that prostitution in Barbados did not lead to sex tourism. They also noted that the high percentage of female single heads of households was due to historical reasons, but that none the less the Government was going to assist those women, especially in relation to the economic adjustment problems. They pointed out that the main fields of work of the Bureau required international assistance and hoped that foreign agencies and international organizations would help Barbadian women to overcome the economic crisis and assist the country in research on the effect of structural adjustment and women's lives. It would be gratifying if the international community could thus benefit from the findings. Special praise was given to the head of State.